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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1245

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1943

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 0902

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2441

RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 2757

RUEAAIA/CIA WASHDC

RHEFAAA/DIA WASHDC

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC 1432

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: PRESIDENT'S ADVISOR WARNS OF AN "INFORMATION WAR"

REF: (A) ASTANA 1402

(B) ASTANA 1255

(C) ASTANA 0943

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: In an August 22 interview published in the newspaper "Liter," Yermukhamet Yertysbayev, President Nazarbayev's advisor on political issues, railed against the "runaway billionaires" who have declared an "information war" designed to besmirch Kazakhstan's international reputation and denied rumors about making President Nazarbayev President-for-Life. Yertysbayev sided with the prosecutors in discussing several recent court cases involving journalists, and he warned that any pressure on the authorities investigating the Kazatomprom case "will not bring good results." In his view, political opposition is "a component of Western culture" that has failed to take root in Kazakhstan. He dismissed rumors of early elections, noting the single-party parliament's "positive role" in support of the anti-crisis program. Yertysbayev asserted that the OSCE is "undergoing a certain crisis" that Kazakhstan could help resolve. On the future of Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy, Yertysbayev said that he would like to see the "European vector" become Kazakhstan's main direction. END SUMMARY.

"AN INFORMATION WAR ON KAZAKHSTAN"

¶3. (SBU) In an interview in the widely read daily "Liter" headlined "Yertysbayev: An Information War Has Been Declared Against Kazakhstan," Yertysbayev described the situation in the country as generally stable but claimed that that the nation's rivals, the "runaway billionaires" -- presumably the former Bank Turan Alem (BTA) Chairman Mukhtar Ablyazov and the President's former son-in-law, Rakhat Aliyev -- have begun an "information war" designed to disgrace Kazakhstan in advance of its 2010 OSCE chairmanship. "For three months, public opinion has been indoctrinated to discredit Kazakhstan in the eyes of the world community," he asserted. He railed against the opposition press for comparing the government's anti-corruption investigations with Stalin's repressions of 1937. The fight against corruption is a legitimate attempt to weed out dishonest government officials and lessen the "corruption tax" on citizens in times of economic crisis,

he asserted. Yertysbayev also ascribed the growing rumors about making President Nazarbayev President-for-life, which have appeared almost exclusively in opposition media, to this "anti-government" information campaign. He categorically denied that such a project is in the works and generally advised "Liter" readers to stop paying heed to "mass hallucinations" and trust government sources.

"YESERGEPOV KNEW HE WAS VIOLATING THE LAW"

¶4. (SBU) Yertysbayev was unequivocal that the courts were correct to convict Ramazan Yesergepov, the editor and owner of newspaper "Alma-Ata Info" (reftel A), although he allowed that the three-year sentence may have been "too harsh." "Yesergepov knew he was violating the law and still published [classified] documents, not altogether for unselfish reasons," Yertysbayev asserted, making reference to the allegation that Yesergepov was paid for writing the article that landed him in trouble. "What does this have to do with freedom of speech?" asked Yertysbayev. "This idea is being imposed on us that freedom of speech is absolute," he continued, "that private telephone conversations and secret government documents can be published." (NOTE: Yertysbayev was clearly referring to several controversial, and at times embarrassing, conversations between high-placed government officials thought to be transcripts of wire-taps that Rakhat Aliyev had kept from when he was Deputy Chairman of the Committee for National Security (KNB) and then posted on the Internet, to the great consternation of the Ak Orda, the Presidential Administration. END NOTE.)

¶5. (SBU) Asked about OSCE's Representative for Freedom of the Media Miklos Haraszti's public criticism of the Yesergepov ruling, Yertysbayev said that "Haraszti is a very intelligent and progressive person, but he trusts unofficial information too much."

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The Law on State Secrets is very clear, said Yertysbayev, and a journalist that obtains and publicizes classified information illegally shall be punished.

BTA'S LIBEL SUIT IS "ABSOLUTELY JUSTIFIED"

¶6. (SBU) Yertysbayev believes that BTA bank is "absolutely justified" in suing the opposition newspaper "Respublika" for allegedly undermining the bank's credibility among clients and investors. BTA filed suit against the newspaper on August 19, alleging that the newspaper's public speculations that the bank was close to failure led to a run on the bank's deposits in excess of 1.4 million tenge (approximately \$9 million). Yertysbayev defended the suit, saying that "Respublika" has run a "continuous campaign to disgrace the bank," thus undermining the government's efforts to keep the bank afloat. Yertysbayev criticized Kazakhstan for "lacking the unity of government and society" that he believes exist in countries like the United States, Spain, France, and Japan. He quoted President Nazarbayev -- "Without unity between the government and the people, we will not overcome the current economic crisis."

KAZATOMPROM CASE "SHOULD NOT BE POLITICIZED"

¶7. (SBU) Yertysbayev shied away from making statements on the case against the former head of state-owned nuclear company Kazatomprom Mukhtar Dzhakishev, saying simply that he prefers to wait for the verdict because this is "a complicated case with serious charges" (reftel C). He did, however, sharply criticize Dzhakishev's lawyer Daniyar Kanafin for "politicizing a purely criminal case" and generating a public reaction that could "destabilize the situation."

(NOTE: As reported in reftel B, the KNB recently sought Kanafin's disbarment for fostering a negative image of Kazakhstan, a request which the Almaty Bar Association denied. END NOTE.) A lawyer "who ignores clear legal norms and forms a negative public opinion of government agencies" does a disservice to his client, argued Yertysbayev. "Pressure on the investigation, the upcoming trial, on the country's rulers, even with the involvement of the international community, will not bring positive results," he asserted.

OPPOSITION "HAS FAILED TO TAKE ROOT"

¶8. (SBU) Yertysbayev gave a glum assessment of the prospects for

opposition parties: "Neither ten years ago, nor now, nor in the future does the opposition have a chance. Opposition is an essential component of Western culture which has failed to take root on Kazakhstani soil, even in Russia it failed to take root. It's unlikely that the opposition in Georgia and Ukraine would have come to power without American support."

NO EARLY ELECTIONS

¶9. (SBU) Yertysbayev categorically denied that Kazakhstan will have early elections before it assumes the OSCE chairmanship. "The President said he sees no reasons for early elections," he stressed. Asked about the comments he made last year in favor of elections, Yertysbayev said that the only way it could happen would be if the Mazhilis unanimously voted for it. "I do not think it will happen now," he said, "because the single-party parliament has played such a positive role in the support of the government's anti-crisis program."

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP

¶10. (SBU) Yertysbayev commented that Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship is an event of "historic and symbolic significance," the first time a post-Soviet, predominantly Muslim country will head the organization. He outlined Kazakhstan's priorities for the chairmanship - to promote inter-religious tolerance, regional security, and non-proliferation, and to tackle issues of energy and food security. Yertysbayev also asserted that the OSCE is "undergoing a particular crisis," and here as well Kazakhstan's chairmanship carries "certain significance." Kazakhstan could serve the role of an independent broker because it has constructive relationships with all OSCE members, "regardless of political

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conditions," he said. When asked about the future of Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy, Yertysbayev admitted that he personally would like to see the "European vector" become Kazakhstan's main direction, the one that Kazakhstan uses as a model for further development.

¶11. (SBU) BIO-NOTE AND COMMENT: Yertysbayev, who is serving as advisor to President Nazarbayev for the third time, is known for his sometimes unorthodox, but always intriguing, statements to the press. During his tenure as the Minister of Culture from 2006 to 2008, Yertysbayev was sued twice for publicly insulting reporters by calling them "scoundrels and rogues," and he was at the epicenter of several scandals involving irregular tender procedures. Last year he caused a stir when he said that Kazakhstan should hold early elections so that it would enter the OSCE chairmanship with at least a two-party parliament, and the subsequent rumors were only put to rest when Nazarbayev publicly stated that he sees no reasons for early elections. Yertysbayev's reference in this interview to the effectiveness of the single-party parliament mirrors recent public comments from Nur Otan party functionaries and appears to confirm that Kazakhstan is not preparing for early elections. Even though some see him as the odd man out, Yertysbayev remains an Ak Orda insider and is a member of the President's inner circle. He may stray from the party line at times, but we believe that he could not have published this interview without the knowledge, and the approval, of his superiors. END COMMENT.

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